

SAM THOMPSON'S HORSEMANSHIP.

BY J. R. STEWART.

THERE is, perhaps, no more unpromising sign in a boy than to find that he has no admiration for a good horse. The horse is everywhere regarded as a noble animal, and it indicates something noble to have an admiration for him. Yet it is a boy's luck to be put off with some old nag — "crow-baits," the boys call them on the hilly farms in Western Pennsylvania — which has been worn to skin and bone, or at least been rendered utterly spiritless and joint-stiff by long years of hard service.

It is a sight to give a good man the heart-ache to see a boy laboring patiently with one of these forlorn animals in the confident hope of changing it all over into an elegant animal, an object of pride to himself and the envy of all the boys in the neighborhood. He feeds it, even extravagantly, but can't keep its bones from sticking up. He rubs it down with a wisp of straw, and wonders why its coat of long, dry hair will not shine. He reins it up energetically, but can't understand why its neck will not assume the form of a beautiful curve. Every feature, motion and attitude of the animal fails somehow to meet his wish. Poor little fellow! If he achieved what he strives for they would take the horse away from him and give him another, probably worse than this one was when he began to remodel it.

If the boy is ever permitted to drive a team, it is his fate to trudge along after the oxen, those sober-minded, slow-going animals, that discourage and distress ambitious boys. When he goes out with them to work he gives notice to the whole neighborhood by loud and continuous shouting which echoes along among the hills, and dies away in the shady nooks of the hollows when he quits at night. He has to drive them at the harrow, a most discouraging task, on a stony, hilly field. At best the harrow is the most unsteady, unguidable implement on the farm; but all day long the boy has to follow it, often on his bare feet, over stones and roots, and he comes home at night hoarse from hallooing at the oxen. If the very boy nature is driven out of him for the time, by this sort of toil, still back it comes on a gallop at the sight of a good horse, and he hungers to have one of

his very own — yes, or a span of them!

Isn't any difference to him whether the Egyptians worshipped oxen or not. If they did, it only proves that they were not so smart as they might have been. Did they never own any horses? Did their great man, Osiris, carry his fine army into Ethiopia with oxen? Did his great regimental musicians, the satyrs, ride in band-wagons drawn by oxen? A pretty show they must have made on a Fourth of July! The thing is too absurd to talk about. The boy knows, without the aid of philosophy or history, that the ox is slow, heavy and dull. Isn't it a very common thing to hear people say "As stupid as an ox?" But who ever says "As stupid as a horse?" On the contrary it is not altogether an uncomplimentary thing to speak of a person as having "good horse sense."

I don't mean to say that the boys on the hilly farms of Western Pennsylvania could put their hands behind their backs, "toe the mark," and repeat in exact order the points of a good, intelligent horse; but they are wonderfully alive to the combined effect of a plump, graceful body on clean, supple limbs, and surmounted by a well-formed head with full, large eyes, short jaws, broad forehead, and neat, erect ears, gracefully diverging from each other. If you doubt it, show one of them a horse in which all these points are reversed and then hear his opinion of it.

"Pshaw!" he would say, "I wouldn't give a cent for such a horse. It's as slow as a cow."

Isn't it a pity, therefore, that a boy with such an ambition, and such knowledge, can't have a good horse of his own? Sam Thompson thought so. But it was his fate to own nothing better than some old cripple that nobody else wanted, or to be condemned to drive oxen till his heart was nearly broken.

He did come to be the owner of a horse once, however, in the way:

One day in the autumn his grandfather came to Mr. Thompson's, and just before he went away he had a little private conversation with Sam, to the following effect:

"Sam," said his grandfather, "wouldn't you like to have a horse of your own?"

"A horseo'meown!" said Sam, in a great monosyllable, and with an emphatic spat of his hands. "A real hop skip-an'-jumper? a goer? Yes, I-guess-I-would!"

"Well," said grandfather, "there's my old Nell. If you'll take good care of her, I believe I'll give her to you. I've been thinking about it for a good while."

"Sure, now gran'f'ther? Ken she git up an' git? I mean, ken she go it?"

"Y-e-e-s," said grandfather, "she can get over the ground right smart yet, if you take good care of her."

"What time ken she makeitin?" said Sam, in a great hurry.

"Time?" said grandfather. "The time's all out of Nell, Sam. Why, she'll be twenty-one years old next spring. You can't expect her to be a real race horse; but it's not every boy has as good a one, mind I tell you."

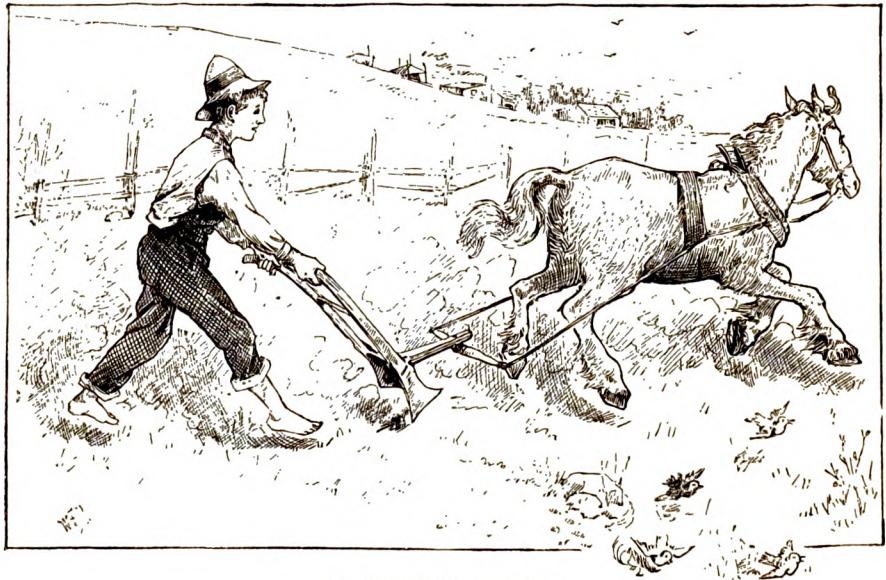
What more passed between them it matters nothing now; but in the course of a few days old Nell was transferred to the Thompson farm and placed under Sam's care. She was lean and lazy, and her hair was very long and woolly. But Sam began with the utmost confidence to "slick her up," as he called it.

Now, this old Nell had two vicious traits. One was that she would run away whenever she got a chance — though now she couldn't run very fast — and the other was that, when tied, she would pretend to be frightened at the most unreasonable things, and would throw her whole weight on the halter strap and break it. Indeed, few horses, either young or old, had ruined more halters. In other respects she was as sober-minded and gentle as an animal of her years ought to be.

Day by day Sam toiled at her to improve her looks and increase her spirits and speed. He fed her at all hours of the day, curried her, rubbed her, and dusted her, and looked anxiously, vainly, to see her

coat begin to shine like those of the plump, fat horses in the stalls at the other end of the stable; but still the coat of long, dry, woolly hair clung to her.

There is not a doubt in the world, however, that her spirits did improve, as Sam found out one day late in the fall, when his father sent him to a distant part of the farm to bring home a small corn plow that had been used there in digging potatoes. Sam took Nell in harness, and was directed to hitch to the plow and just slide it along on the ground. Nell stepped along so gently, and obeyed his commands so readily that when he had reached the plow and hitched her to it he had the most implicit confidence in her — such confidence that he really did not think it worth while to take down the reins, but trusted to the word of



SAM FOUND IT DIFFICULT.

command to guide her on her homeward route.

"Git up, Nell," he said, when he had hitched her to the plow and taken hold of the handles. Off she started at an easy pace, which she soon quickened to to a lively walk, and this to a little trot. Sam found it difficult to keep up with the plow, for his legs were very short. By some blunder — he couldn't account for it at all — he tripped and fell, and his hands being now off the plow handles it tipped over on its side, the whiffletree came clattering against her heels, and away she went at the top of her speed, down through the field, out at an open gate and on through he meadow to a pair of bars near the barn. Sam looked after in dismay and began to doubt his grand-

father's statement that the time was all out of Nell. She seemed to be as light-footed now as a three-year-old, and over the bars she went with a bound. The plow sailing after her — as a plow must under such circumstances — caught the upper bar and broke it out, and then, coming to the ground at once, the point caught under a firm stone. Here the plow was demolished, and when Sam came up he found Nell standing at the stable door as calmly as if nothing had happened, and with nothing but the naked beam of the plow hanging to the whiffletree.

When his father came home he questioned Sam closely about the mishap, and Sam told just how it happened. No one is at liberty to suppose that if the boys on the hilly farms do get into bad scrapes they are in the habit of getting out of them in a shabby fashion. They are manly enough to "face the music," as they say, and they tell a wonderfully straight story — straight because it is true. It is remarkable, in fact, that a true story is always straighter than a — that is, than one that is not true.

Mr. Thompson simply said, "Well, there's no use cryin' over spilled milk ; but don't let the like o' this happen again. If you do, Nell may have to have a new driver."

Sam was cast down, but not discouraged, and as soon as he recovered a little from his fright he began again to groom old Nell. He even redoubled his energy and kept it up far into the winter. As the other horses increased in plumpness — a result of good feeding and little work — he strove the harder and wondered the more why her coat didn't get smooth and glossy too.

At last a very brilliant idea struck him — brilliant he thought it at first, though he changed his mind afterward. It was the custom on the hilly farms in Western Pennsylvania, in the winter — especially was it the custom at Mr. Thompson's — to eat plenty of roast turkey. Now, what possible connection can there be between this story and roast turkey? Just this:

Sam Thompson, standing thoughtfully in the stable looking at Nell one cold day, with his hands deep in his trousers pockets, thought of turkey fat. When the idea struck him he almost shouted with delight. He wouldn't have paid five cents for the advice of the best horse-jockey in the land as to the proper course to pursue. He went directly to the house, got into the pantry silently, took out an old tin cup full of turkey fat, and, going straight to the stable, began

his new scheme for making Nell shiny and sleek. He went all over her, and rubbed on the grease plentifully, determined that the job should be well done. But the result didn't please him. He thought it didn't look natural. He stood off and looked at it ; then drew nearer again ; then changed his position and surveyed the prospect from all the most favorable points of view. Still it did not please him though, the truth is, he was not a hard boy to please. Indeed, in this instance he was anxious to be pleased.

After a moment's reflection he seized the curry-comb and brush, and applied them vigorously ; but they only left the hair looking as if it had been pasted tight to the skin. Of course that didn't suit him. So he brushed and combed it the wrong way. But that suited him still less, for it only made it stand on end in little tufts and spears. To his taste — and to yours, too, if you had been there to see — Nell's coat was now no more beautiful than a sheep's coat stuck full of burrs.

And now, standing and looking at the result of his experiment, he began to suspect that he had made a mistake. Then he went cheerfully and hopefully to work to wipe off the grease ; but before he had accomplished this — probably it was a long time before — his father came into the stable. Again Sam had to "face the music" and tell all about it. But he hadn't the least doubt that if his father had only staid away a little longer he could have rubbed it all off and restored things to their original appearance. If he could have accomplished this it was truly a desirable thing to do, for then he would have avoided unpleasant consequences and been at the same time in the possession of all the knowledge which the experiment could furnish. In short, he knew to his entire satisfaction that turkey fat was a mortifying failure as a means of improving an old mare's woolly coat, and he was somewhat anxious that no one should know how he found it out.

By some means the boys in school heard of this experiment and for weeks they tormented him mercilessly about it. If you have ever made a small mistake of the kind you probably know something about it yourself. But how do such things get abroad so soon? My own opinion — gathered from some personal experience — is that the news of them travels in the air. At any rate it does travel.

Some time after his ambitious experiment he had a very exciting ride on Nell. It happened on Sunday and about this way :

"Now, Sam," said his mother, that morning, "Mr. Brayman said at church last Sunday that he would soon be around on his pastoral visits, and I hope you can show him when he comes that you have been getting along nicely with your catechism. Get your book now and don't be all your life learning your 'questions.'"

"Yes," said Sam, "I'll give them a try," and he seated himself and went to work.

Now, I ought to say that when Sam was a boy the preacher in the hilly regions of Pennsylvania had usually a very large parish spread out over a wide stretch of country. In the winter time he made a systematic round of visits among his parishioners, and always examined the children at each house in their catechism. It was for such a visit that Sam was now required to get ready.

He did his best at the questions, but his mind wandered off a good deal. Presently he went to the stable and rubbed Nell off once. Then he went back and applied himself again to the book, but didn't make much progress. At last, about noon he returned to the barn, and there and then he concluded that he wanted to take a ride. He thought Nell might want a drink. True, there was a water trough near the door; but then

there was a creek about a mile away, and she might feel that she was not well treated if he didn't water her there occasionally. Yes; there could be no doubt that Nell needed and must have a drink out of the creek. Accordingly he prepared to take her there.

And now, if you want to understand this story thoroughly, sit right down and take off your shoe. Examine it, and you will find a small hole in the upper-leather just about half-way up the heel. It is an awl-hole—showing that the leather is not all whole.

You will notice too, that if you should take a small carpet tack, just half an inch long, and push it through this hole from the inside outward, and then

put on the shoe, the tack couldn't get out. If you should fix both your shoes that way you might be said to have on a pair of spurs. Well, that is exactly the way Sam fixed it.

Then he bridled Nell, mounted her bareback and started off to the creek.

She walked along soberly up the lane, then turned down "the big road" and on past the school house down to the creek, where she drank, and turned about to come home. Now Sam thought it was time to begin if he was to have any fun, for he had not yet touched her with the spurs. He gave her a little touch with one heel, and she started up at a brisk trot. This came near jostling him off, and, to hold himself on, he thoughtlessly pressed both heels hard against



THE WHOLE HOUSEHOLD WERE OUT.

her sides. This was a terrible blunder. Away she flew like the wind, and he had to stick his heels in the harder to keep his seat. On she went, up the big road, down the lane under the apple-trees where he had to lie down flat to keep from being torn off by the branches. Still the horrible spurs were in her sides, and on she dashed to the barn, but could not stop. She rushed through under the cattle sheds, down through the cattle sheds, down through the yard, and leaped over the bars—the same bars where the plow had been demolished the fall before—and away through the meadow, still suffering from the the merciless spurs, from which Sam could find no way to relieve her without great danger to himself. At last, as she plunged through a deep snow-drift, she

was obliged to slacken her speed a little, and Sam rolled off, tumbling head over heels into the snow.

The first thing he did when he scrambled up, and brushed the snow out of his eyes, was to cast about to see if anybody was looking. Oh, horror! The whole household was out, gazing in utter amazement. And now what should he do?

Well, what would you have done? Would you have come home whimpering and sniffing, and said that Nell got out of the stable and started off, probably intending to go back to grandfather's? and that you had gone after and caught her, bridled her and started to ride her home, and that she had run away with you? Would you have done that? No boy with a

grain of good metal in him would have told such a story, and Sam didn't.

He came home looking a good deal ashamed, but laughing as best he could. This is what he said:

"You see, gran't'her said the time was all out of Nell, and I wanted to find out if it was true, and it isn't. D'ye see them spurs?" And that was all the explanation he made.

"Well, I never!" said his mother, in astonishment; "and on the Sabbath day, too! It's a mercy you were not killed! Now go into the house and take them horrid things out o' your shoes, and get your 'question book.'"

Sam learned his questions that time.

A RIDDLE.

RIDDLE me! riddle me! riddle-me-ree!
Who will unravel my riddle for me?

A monster, a terrible monster it seems,
—Did I see it while waking, or only in dreams? —
That flies on its track
With a crash and a thwack
And a roar as of thunder and lightning, good
lack!

One eye in its head
Glowing brilliant and red,
'Twas a thing to look at with fear and dread!
With a mouth that feeds upon coal and coke,
And a breath that belches out flame and smoke,
With a body so long, and thick, and black,
And a bell tight fastened above its back —
It was tougher to look at than bone and gristle,
And whenever it spoke it could only whistle!

Twelve great feet, both black and strong,
Carried its terrible frame along —
Six on the left and six on the right,
Running together with all their might,
With a mighty sound as if winds were rushing
And tempests crushing,
With a monstrous rumbling
And awful grumbling
With a mighty wheezing
Of breathing and sneezing,
With a whistle and shriek,
And a snort and a shriek,

And a terrific pother
Of noise and of bother,
With a wonderful rattle, and din, and shaking
As if every bone in its body were aching,
With a jerk on heels and a bounce on toes —
This is the way that the monster goes!
But in spite of his strength and noise and size
The creature is really kind and wise;
At a single touch, or a single click,
He'll go like a rocket, or stop like a stick;
He'll carry some hundreds of boys or more
Out to a picnic, or down to the shore;
If girls just ask him, the jolly old duffer
Will drop them at grandma's in time for their supper;
Give him a drink, and just tighten his girth,
He'll bring you your friends from the ends of the
earth;
Give him his favorite meal of coals,
And fast and as far as the telegraph poles
He'll bring you sweet oranges up from the south,
Grapes from the east that will melt in your mouth,
Wine from the south that will fly to your head,
Corn for your muffins and wheat for your bread —
Everything beautiful, precious and sweet,
Everything wondrous to see and to eat,
Everything useful to sell and to buy,
This monster will bring in the wink of an eye!
Now Riddle me! riddle me! riddle-me-ree!
Who will unravel this riddle for me?